BRITISH COLUMBIA

Minister's Education Report

BARGAINING UPDATE

The B.C. Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) and the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF) continued meeting over the weekend under the guidance of mediator Irene Holden.

The Province has successfully reached fair deals with 83 per cent of all public sector workers.

To date, we've negotiated 123 four-year agreements with 255,000 public sector workers, including thousands of school support staff. These settlements had salary increases of between 8 and 14 per cent.

Now we're seeking the same result with the B.C. Teachers' Federation. That's why we recently made an offer that will significantly increase pay and benefits for every teacher in B.C.

The offer includes:

- $3,700 bonus for signing before the contract expires on June 30th.
- 10 per cent salary increase over four years.
- $1,850 special allowance for teachers in remote areas and hard to fill positions.
- Up to a $1,000 dividend at the end of a four-year contract.
- Increases to compassionate leave, health benefits and average preparation time.

The offer is in addition to what we have already provided teachers over the last year, including:

- An average two per cent increase to standardize salary scales.
- An average 35 per cent increase to Teacher on Call salaries.
- A one-time rebate averaging $1,200 each for contributions to the teachers' Disability Trust Fund.

What does it all mean for individual teachers?

A first-year teacher in Surrey would receive $7,459 more this year – and $11,855 by 2010.

A first-year teacher in Prince Rupert would receive $7,587 more this year – and $17,645 by 2010.

And a teacher with 10 years' experience would receive about $7,672 more this year – and $14,053 by 2010.

Is this a fair deal for teachers?

You decide.

For more information on teacher bargaining visit **www.gov.bc.ca** and click on the **Teacher Bargaining** icon.

FAQs

Here are some questions I am often asked during my conversations with parents, teachers and the general public.

Q: Will the $3,700 incentive bonus be available after the contract expires on June 30?

A: We are following the same process for incentive payments across the entire public sector. That's fair. The deadline is firm. If teachers do not reach an agreement by June 30, the $3,700 early signing bonus is off the table.

Q: Is there a shortage of teachers in B.C.?

A: There is no general teacher shortage. Some subject areas (like mathematics, physics, languages and some areas of special education) have historically been harder to recruit and there is increasing demand for French Immersion teachers. Some rural and remote districts have difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers. To address that, the employer has offered a $1,850 special allowance for teachers in remote areas and hard to fill positions.

In 2005/06, our public post-secondary institutions had more than 4,400 student spaces devoted to teacher education, and 2,370 degrees were granted.

Q: Isn't there a shortage of substitute teachers, or teachers on call?

A: There is a temporary shortage of teachers on call, and that's understandable considering an additional 1,200 teachers were hired in B.C. public schools this year. That's because government provided school districts with $150-million increase in funding. Government also provided $20 million earlier this school year to hire more teachers to address class size and composition. The majority of those teachers were hired from the teacher-on-call lists.

Q: Are more B.C. teachers leaving for Alberta?

A: The reality is that over the last three years, 427 Alberta teachers moved to B.C. compared to 316 B.C. teachers who moved to Alberta. In fact, more Alberta teachers moved to B.C. in each of the last three years. This has occurred even though there have been barriers in place making it more difficult for Alberta teachers to move here.

B.C. teachers have long been able to teach in Alberta with their B.C. credentials. Now, thanks to the new Alberta-B.C. Trade and Labour Agreement, it will be easier for Alberta teachers to live and work in B.C.

Q: How do B.C.'s teacher salaries compare to other provinces?

A: The average maximum salary for a B.C. teacher is $64,489. That is currently third among provinces. B.C.'s economy is third in Canada. Salaries for other B.C. public sector workers, such as nurses, are also third in Canada. This is competitive and appropriate. Comparisons to other jurisdictions are only relevant when there is what's called a 'labour market issue' – a consistent shortage of staff because salaries are not competitive. In this case, there is no shortage of teachers.